

Top Secret

LEBANON:

Prospects for Higgins Rescue Growing Dim

*Chances that Lieutenant Colonel Higgins will be rescued are fading as time passes and as Amal reconsiders its efforts to find him. In the 10 days since the kidnaping, Hizballah has had time to reinforce the security around Higgins and to shift the burden of guilt onto Amal for trying to release a US "spy."*

Meanwhile, crowds at rallies in Beirut orchestrated by Hizballah to oppose Secretary Shultz's visit to the Middle East yesterday chanted slogans demanding death to the US and to Higgins. Hizballah speakers urged confrontation with both the US and the UN to remove them from Lebanon.

It is unlikely that Higgins will be found soon. Hizballah leaders and Iran are now aware he was a former member of Secretary Weinberger's staff and no doubt assume he has detailed knowledge of US programs and plans in Lebanon and the Middle East. Amal will probably continue a cursory search for Higgins but will try to avoid clashes with Hizballah that could expose its weakness in the south.

The abduction seems to be part of a larger effort to intensify pressure on the US, France, and the UN to end their presence in Lebanon, to resolve hostage issues on Iranian and Hizballah terms, and probably to obtain the release of Shia terrorists imprisoned in Kuwait. Hizballah's leaders and their Iranian patrons evidently think the US and France are particularly vulnerable because of their coming elections. Hizballah—or parts of it—will probably try more kidnapings, release videos, possibly free a hostage, and seek other publicity to jostle the political process in both Washington and Paris.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

DATE: Sept 2000

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26 February 1988